

L'Esprit du Chemin moves on

Huberta Wiertsema and Arno Cuppen



«Each way needs stopping places where travellers can take a rest. For us, l'Esprit du Chemin is our own stopping place on our way to... who knows. For the time being, our backpacks are here to stay at our doorstep.»

Each year, usually during winter, when we had time to go through the content of our website, we came across this sentence. 'A stopping place on our way to...' Our gaze never wavered when we read that sentence. We never asked ourselves if we were still on our way. Or if that sentence meant that we paid lip service to being a pilgrim. Was it an unthinkingly pronounced willingness to move on?

In short, we fully enjoyed the «here and now» in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port. But all that changed in March 2012. Right at the start of the summer season, Arno suffered severe health problems. We both felt a strong need for more privacy and more time to ourselves. That's when the plan originated to run the hostel together with another couple as of 2013.

Unfortunately, this plan fell through as soon as it was put to practice. That really put a damper on things. And on top of that, Arno's health issues resurfaced. It is true that in each crisis lies the root for something new, but at the time our disappointment was complete. However, the sense of urgency that we felt was even stronger, as we had to ensure the smooth running of our hostel. So we went in search for help and got it. Thank heavens! As soon as we came into tranquil waters again, the question rose: What does this mean for the future of our hostel?

Moreover, we had started out on this adventure together, but we had never considered how and when our joint adventure would end. This may sound logical when you start something new, but it becomes tricky if the story turns bad. Especially as things became too much for one of us. Everything is so connected: the living together and the working together. Whereas Huberta was looking for new ways to organize ourselves in Saint-Jean, Arno was convinced that trying to change the actual situation would stand little chance of success. It was very tough for both of us, because we barely had the time and the space to talk this through. The daily work always had top priority.

Arno decided to unwind and to distance himself for a bit. For several months, he stayed in a hut in the mountains. After a special encounter with a shepherd, many treasured ideas sprung up again and converged into a new plan for a hostel that offered more possibilities for reflection and silence, for nature and culture. However, this new plan asked for a

new location. He wrote about it in a letter to Huberta. She found the idea daunting; still, she encouraged him by saying: 'Why don't you go and check it out.' And that's what he did. All this took place behind the scenes in a bit of a 'sneaky' way, as we wanted to keep the idea of a new location to ourselves for a while.

Change means searching for something new, but also leaving behind what is most familiar to you. Arno wanted to move on, but Huberta was still clinging to her life and work in the hostel, although she realized that the time together there was over. Yes, something new was exciting, but did we really have to give up our hostel? Did we really have to leave Saint-Jean? Did we want to leave all that behind just at the height of success? After ten years of refurbishing, everything was just as we wanted it to be and the hostel was running very well. It was our 10 years' jubilee, a milestone. Not in the least for the many volunteers who have been helping us for all these years. But for us, the ground was moving under our feet.

In the end, our desire to continue walking the (pilgrim) way together was decisive. So yes, we pick up our backpacks again and L'Esprit du Chemin moves on. Our way leads us from the hectic stopping place of Saint-Jean to a much quieter spot on the Burgundian countryside. From the scenic crossing of the Pyrenees to the historic and spiritual Vézelay.

It's a big step, emotionally, practically and financially. But dreams are there to be lived, right? And as pilgrims we are confident that it will all work out well. That other people will want to share our life and dreams. Care to join us?

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